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A Shiʿi Lebanese reading of Sunni Hadith: progress, inclusivity, and an empowered contestation of narratives

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A Shiʿi Lebanese reading of Sunni Hadith: progress, inclusivity, and an empowered contestation of narratives

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ABSTRACT

This article assesses a Shi'i-Lebanese debate over Sunni Hadith in the context of state formation and Shi'i integration into this new entity. ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mūsawī, the most authoritative Shi'i-Lebanese jurist of his time, relied on Sunni compilers of Hadith, to prove the veracity of Shi'i Islam, to a Sunni audience. Nevertheless, these treatises cannot be viewed as traditional polemics. Instead, they reflected Mūsawī's position as a proud Shi'i leader of a community which received historical recognition in the new nation state. Beyond Lebanon, Mūsawī perceived himself as a peer of Sunni modernized forces and thought the time was ripe for acceptance of Shi'ism, through shared values, a pan-Islamic vision and a critical approach to Hadith, in its content and narrators, within a more humanized depiction of the Companions. Mūsawī did not deviate from classical Shi'i notions. Nevertheless, he joined forces with Shi'i reformists in their quest for historical reconciliation with Sunnis, within an expanded notion of orthodoxy. In his understanding, Sunni recognition of a toned down Shi'i historiography, together with Shi'i endorsement of Sunni Hadith, may pave the way for a cross-sectarian narrative based on a progressive vision of Islam and on a rational approach to the texts.

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Introduction

In the shift towards the modern era, texts and historical narratives became an important topic for forces of change in the Muslim world. With the crumbling of the Ottoman Empire, the emerging Salafi movement called to revive the Golden Age of the Rightly Guided Caliphs (*al-khulafā' al-rashīdūn*) and return to the sources of the Qur'an and the Hadith [The traditions related to the Prophet Muhammad that recorded what the Prophet did and said, regarded as the second in authority only to the Qur'an]. The recreation of this Golden Age when Islam was at its height and the return to the sources of Islam were perceived as a panacea to the threat of Western Imperialism and the loss of Muslim power. As a guide to Muslim behaviour, the vast body of Hadith assumed an important place in a new debate over the direction of a community in transition. Muslim reformists, and modernists—linked to the Salafi movement or to the emerging pan-Arab trend—began raising questions over the place of the Hadith and its authenticity, in an era of new

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knowledge.[1] ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mūsawī (1872/3–1957)—the most authoritative Shi'i jurist in Lebanon of his time—was one of the first Shi'i clerics who joined this critical discussion on the place of Hadith. Why did Mūsawī rely extensively on Sunni Hadith in multiple treatises given the historical Sunni-Shi'i clash over the legacy of the Prophet, his traditions and the question of authority[2]; and what is the significance of this debate?

This article will explore Mūsawī's debate over Sunni Hadith in the context of Lebanese state formation and Shi'i integration into this new entity. It will also view Mūsawī's contribution within the broader Sunni discussion, both historical and contemporary, over the legacy of the Prophet. The article assesses Mūsawī's effort to create a dialogue between shi'a and Sunni thought in the context of modernity, reform and Shi'i integration into the embryonic state of Lebanon. It will be based on a textual reading of Mūsawī's thought focusing on his approach to the question of Hadith, combining intellectual history with an analysis of socio-political processes in the period under study.

The study opens with an introduction on Mūsawī's figure, evaluating his leadership role through the prism of modernization, social change and the proliferation of new ideas in Lebanon and the broader region, during this period. The second part explores Mūsawī's quest for Muslim unity as a basis for understanding his engagement with Sunni Hadith, focusing on the following treatises: *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimma fī Ta'līf al-Umma* [Important Chapters in the Formation of the Umma], 'Ila al-Majma' al-'Ilmī al-'Arabī bi-Dimashq' [To The Scientific Arab Academy in Damascus] and al-Naṣṣ wa'l Ijtihād [the text/designation and *ijtihad*]. All three publications are evaluated within the broader context of Shi'i-state relations, Shi'i reformist trends in Lebanon and Iraq, the Salafi and pan-Arab movements, and the interconnectivity between these diverse developments. After laying out the basis for Mūsawī's reconciliation efforts, the following discussion explores his debate on Hadith through two treatises: al-Murājaʿāt [re-examination] and Abū Hurayra [a prolific narrator in Sunni sources]. This last section assesses the intellectual framework of Mūsawī's encounter with Sunni Hadith, revisiting the question of the Companions and the Shi'i perception of authority.

Mūsawī began operating in a period in which the Shi'is of Jabal 'Āmil and the Beqā' were going through profound changes with the establishment of the new Republic of Lebanon (1926). Shi'is who historically lived in segregated communities became citizens in the new Lebanese entity. Integration into this multi-confessional state altered communal ties and redefined relations with the Sunni community in Lebanon and with the broader Muslim milieu. Mūsawī envisioned a new dawn in Sunni–Shi'i relations as a result of contemporary values, joint interests and common political challenges.

[1]J.H.A. Juynboll, *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature: Discussion in Modern Egypt* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1969); Mutaz al-Khatib, 'Hadith Criticism between Traditionists and Jurisprudents', in Belal Abu-Alabbas, Michael Dann and Christopher Melchert (eds.) *Modern Hadith Studies: Continuing Debates and New Approaches* (Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 129–150.

[2]The historical rift between Sunnis and Shi'is began in the early days of Islam over the question of succession to the Prophet Muhammad, incorporating questions of leadership, authority, religion-state relations, and theology. See for example, Maria Massi Dakake, *The Charismatic Community: Shi'ite Identity in Early Islam* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2012); Wilferd Madelung, *The Succession to Muhammad: A Study of the Early Caliphate* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Ofra Bengio and Meir Litvak (eds.) *The Sunna and Shi'a in History: Division and Ecumenism in the Muslim Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), Moshe Sharon, 'The Development of the debate Around the Legitimacy of Authority in Early Islam' in Fred M. Donner (ed.) *The Articulation of Early Islamic State Structures* (London: Routledge, 2016), 122–141.

Born in Kāẓimayn in Iraq (1290/1873) to a clerical family from Jabal ʿĀmil, Mūsawī gained his education in Najaf and later returned to Southern Lebanon to become the spiritual leader of the Shiʿi-Lebanese community in Tyre. Mūsawī arrived in Jabal ʿĀmil in 1904 in a period in which the local Shiʿi community began to be exposed to early manifestations of modern change.[3] The first modern schools were established in Jabal ʿĀmil during the late 19th century, as missionary schools, or Sunni-led institutions. In the following decades, a small group of Shiʿi notables (*zuʿamāʾ*) from leading Shiʿi families of landowners and merchants began gaining modern education and acquiring growing influence.[4] In 1909, Aḥmad ʿArif al-Zayn inaugurated the *al-ʿirfān* journal, which became the mouthpiece of Shiʿi reformist circles in Lebanon, during the first half of the 20th century.[5] The development of transportation enabled Mūsawī to embark on trips to Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Iran. His visit to Cairo (1911–1912) resulted, according to Mūsawī's account, in a correspondence with Salīm al-Bishrī, Shaykh al-Azhar of the time, over the Shiʿi narrative, discussed below.[6]

Following the San Remo Agreement (April 1920), the Shiʿi population of Jabal ʿĀmil and the Beqāʿ were incorporated into the State of Greater Lebanon. On 27 January 1926, the French Mandatory authorities formally recognized the Shiʿi *jaʿfari madhhab* as an independent Islamic school of law. The creation of Lebanon state under a Western-Christian alliance provided historical recognition for this persecuted minority. A new network of courts that dealt with issues of personal status contributed to the integration and institutionalization of Shiʿa Islam within the new state of Lebanon. These courts were staffed by mid to low-rank Shiʿi clerics as the *mujtahid*s opposed this new state-affiliated institution that challenged the historical monopoly of the clerical leadership.[7] Mūsawī, who rejected French occupation in its early days, created working relations with the French authorities to advance his revivalist agenda. During the 1930s, Mūsawī petitioned for jobs for his sons in the Jaʿfari Court [a Shiʿi court established by the French authorities to deal with questions of personal status], even though this court undermined the position of the *mujtahid*s and their historical autonomy. One of his main missions was to advance Shiʿi education by opening modern schools for the community. Mūsawī began reaching out to the French. In May 1932, Mūsawī invited the *Counseiller*

[3]This discussion on the multi-faceted process of modernization (including road and rail links, communication, urbanization, state-education, the emergence of new social classes etc.) and on new ideas emanating from modern change, is based on the cultural approach to development. In place of a binary and essentialized Western paradigm of modernity, this article applies a cultural approach to development within a dialectical exchange between the Muslim world and contemporary change. On this approach see for example, Timothy Mitchel (ed.), *Questions of Modernity* (Minneapolis, MN; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2000); Bassam Tibi, *Islam's Predicament with Modernity: Religious Reform and Cultural Change* (London; New York, NY: Routledge, 2009), Ali Mirseppasi, 'New Geographies of Modernity', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 26:1 (2006), 1–15.

[4]Kais M. Firro, "The Shiʿis in Lebanon: Between Communal *ʿAsabiyya* and Arab Nationalism", 1908–21, *Middle Eastern Studies* 42:4 (July 2006), 535–550; Tamara Chalabi and Fuad Ajami, *The Shiʿis of Jabal ʿAmil and the New Lebanon: Community and Nation-State,1918–1943* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 19–26.

[5]On the journal's aims see, *al-ʿirfān* 14 (1937), 1. See also, *al-ʿirfān* 34 (Nov. 1947), 2–4; Tarif Khalidi, "Shaykh Ahmad ʿArif al-Zayn and al-ʿIrfan', in Marwan R. Buheiry (ed.) Intellectual Life in the Arab East, 1890–1939 (Beirut: American University of Beirut, Center for Arab and Middle East Studies, 1981), 110–124.

[6]W. Ende, 'Sharaf al-Dīn', *Encyclopaedia of Islam II* R. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, (accessed 25.7.22); Sabrina Marvin, *Un Réformisme Chiite; Ulémas et Lettres du Gabal Amil (Actuel Liban-Sud) de la Fin de l'Empire Ottoman à l'Indépendance du Liban* (Paris: Karthala, 2000), 301–310, 430; Rainer Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism in the 20th Century: The Azhar and Shiism between Rapprochement and Restraint*. Translated from the German by Joseph Greenman Revised and Updated by the author (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 51–81.

[7]Max Weiss, 'Institutionalizing Sectarianism: The Lebanese Jaʿfari Court and Shiʿi Society under the French Mandate', *Islamic Law and Society* 15 (2008) 371–407.

Administratif to attend an Ashura sermon and 3 years later he invited him to participate in the Ghadir Day [marking the designation of ʻAlī by the Prophet as his successor, according to the Shiʻi narrative]. In 1938, Mūsawī inaugurated the Jaʻfaiyya school which became part of his larger network of religious, and social institutions, including a school for girls, which he established during his life time.[8] Mūsawī, had to reposition himself with the growing influence of leading Shiʻi families, who began acting as mediators, raising the concerns of the neglected Shiʻi south to the authorities.[9] His response was to join Shiʻi efforts towards integration and to take them one step further, by reaching out to Sunnis in Lebanon and beyond, to recognize Shiʻism as an integral component of a new Muslim orthodoxy. Mūsawī died in 1957 and was buried in Najaf. In his obituary (published in *al-ʻirfān*), Mūsawī was hailed as a reformist who contributed to advancing knowledge, to the struggle against ignorance and to the promotion of friendship between diverse Islamic trends.[10]

Mūsawī's call for rapprochement with the Sunni world corresponded with the Pan-Islamic congresses which took place between the two wars, with the involvement of al-Azhar scholars. Shiʻi representatives attended the Jerusalem Congress of 1931, the most prominent among them was Muḥammad Ḥusayn Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʼ (1876/7–1954), the highly respected Iraqi *mujtahid* known for this reformist agenda. Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʾ was given the honour of speaking at the conference's opening session. An even more outstanding act was the historical decision to invite Kāshif al-Ghiṭāʼ to lead the Friday prayer in al-Aqṣā Mosque. Nevertheless, reconciliation between Sunnis and Shiʻis was not the main agenda of these pan-Islamic conferences. Moreover, alongside these encounters between Sunni and Shiʻis, key figures in the Sunni-Arab world continued to express anti-Shiʻi position. Noteworthy among them was the Muslim reformist scholar Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935) and the Egyptian historian Aḥmad Amīn (1886–1954).[11]

The quest for Muslim unity

The question of Hadith was part of Mūsawī's broad-ranging effort to create a new future for Sunnis and Shiʻis by putting aside past enmities. In *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimma fī Taʼlīf al-Umma* (1909) [Important Chapters in the Formation of the Umma], Mūsawī laid the basis for his pan-Islamic mission:

> I am living in the era of knowledge and in the period of intelligence and astuteness. The Spring of Wisdom has burst forth to the people of this era and the gloom of darkness has been removed from their eyes. The electricity of light shines from their thought and rays of grace radiated from their faces … As a result, they have destroyed zealous partisanship and

[8]Max Weiss, *In the Shadow of Sectarianism: Law, Shiʻism, and the Making of Modern Lebanon* (Cambridge, Ma and London, England, 2010), 71–77; Hussein M. Gharbieh, "Political Awareness of the Shiʻites in Lebanon: The Role of Sayyid ʻAbd al-Husain Sharaf al-Din and Sayyid Musa al-Sadr", *PhD. Thesis, Center for Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies, University of Durham* (1996), 105–126; Rula Jurdi Abisaab, "Lebanese Shiʿites and The Marjaʻiyya: Polemic in the Late Twentieth Century, *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 36: 2 (Aug. 2009), 215–239; Rula Jurdi Abisaab and Malek Abisaab, *The Shiʻits of Lebanon: Modernism, Communism, and Hizbullah's Islamists* (Syracuse New York: Syracuse University Press, 2014), 1–44; Ende, *Sharaf al-Dīn*.

[9]Chalabi and Ajami, *The Shiʻis of Jabal ʻAmil*, 115–128.

[10]*Al-ʻIrfān* (1957), 466–472.

[11]See Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 84–102. See also, Jacob M. Landau, *Pan-Islam: History and Politics* (London: Routledge, 1990); Elisheva Machlis, "An Initial Shiʻa Debate on the Palestinian Question". *Middle Eastern Studies* (2022), 1–17, DOI: 10.1080/00263206.2022.2083110.

> erased its traces. They have also complied with the duties of humanity, erected their lighthouse and hailed the call of civilization to devote their attention to Shi i-Sunni unity ... [12]

> Prosperity and progress will not be established nor will the search for the spirit of civilization be possible ... we will also not succeed in removing from our necks the yoke of slavery through the struggle for freedom, without harmony, meeting of the minds, synchronicity of hearts, unity of resolution, agreement over the renaissance (*nahḍa*) of the *umma*'s ethics and promotion of the essence of the religious community.[13]

For Mūsawī, the modern era and its values was not a threat but an opportunity to provide progress and prosperity for the community through historical reconciliation between Sunnis and Shi'is. He relied on terminology reminiscent of the Enlightenment, in his reference to notions of knowledge, wisdom, light, humanity and civilization. *Al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimma* was written in 1909 in the same year in which Aḥmad 'Ārif al-Zayn inaugurated *al-'Irfān*. Mūsawī gained religious education in Najaf. Yet, he was well-aware of new ideas that began to be advanced through the Arab cultural revival of the Nahda movement [the Arab Awakening, a movement of cultural, linguistic, and political change which began in the late 19th century]. The movement also reached the emerging Shi'i intelligentsia of Jabal 'Āmil, in the transition to the 20th century. Mūsawī was also a product of this new era. Consequently, his wording here not only reflected an appeal to modernist circles but perhaps also his own identification with some contemporary values, including knowledge, progress and the struggle for freedom from the despotic Sultan or from the growing influence of Imperialism.

The call for sectarian rapprochement became common among Shi'i reformist clerics in Iraq and Lebanon, following the creation of these two nation states. A process of modernization and social change which followed Western occupation created a debate between steadfast clerics who sought to fortify their endangered position; and a group of reform-minded clerics who believed that measured change was inevitable. These reformist clerics began re-evaluating key notions of Shi'i thought in theology, historiography, jurisprudence and politics.[14] Sayyid Muḥsin al-Amīn al-'Āmilī (1867/8–1952), was a contemporary of Mūsawī from Jabal 'Āmil who was acknowledged as the spiritual leader of the local Shi'i community in Damascus and endorsed a reformist agenda. He called to reevaluate the contested Muslim historiography, expressing an appeasing attitude towards the early Muslim leadership, including the Prophet's Companions, the *ṣaḥāba*.[15] In Iraq, the most well-known reformists were Muḥammad Ḥusayn Kāshif al-Ghiṭā, mentioned above, and Shaykh Muḥammad Mahdī al-Khāliṣī (1890–1963). While each of these clerics concentrated on diverse areas of reform, they were united in their progressive approach to religion and in their emphasis on Muslim unity. Through their wide-ranging reforms, these clerics sought to safeguard the place of religion in society and to preserve the historical leadership role of the *mujtahid*s. Among Mūsawī's unique

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[12] 'Abd al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mūsawī, *Al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimma fī Ta'līf al-Umma* (Baghdad: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 2008 edition), 7–8.
[13] Ibid.
[14] See, Elisheva Machlis, *Shi'i Sectarianism in the Middle East: Modernisation and the Quest for Islamic Universalism* (London & New York: I.B. Tauris, 2014); Elisheva Machlis, 'The Cross-Sectarian Call for Islam: A Sample of Shi'a Reformist Thought', *Journal of Shi'a Islamic Studies* 2:2 (Spring 2009), 195–219.
[15] Machlis, *Shi'i Sectarianism*, 68–76.

contributions to this movement of Shi'i reform was his debate over the question of Hadith.

Mūsawī sought to create a shared textual basis while sidelining problematic figures, both historical and contemporary. In 1949, Mūsawī wrote a polemical response to the Syrian journalist and scholar, Kurd 'Alī, entitled: 'Ila al-Majma' al-'Ilmī al-'Arabī bi-Dimashq' [To The Scientific Arab Academy in Damascus] Muḥammad Kurd 'Alī (1876–1953) headed the Arab Academy in Damascus, an institute which was designed to preserve and modernize the Arabic language and to research the history of Syria.[16] Kurd 'Alī represented a growing trend among Arab nationalists of his time to rehabilitate the Umayyad dynasty. The Umayyads who were associated in the Shi'i memory with the martyrdom of Imam Husayn were exonerated by Arab nationalists as model of a glorious Arab past.[17] Kurd 'Alī also questioned the ethnic origins of Shi'a Islam, linking its development with the Persian Shu'ubiyya movement.[18] This notion of Shu'ubiyya goes back to early Muslim history (8–9th centuries) to a movement that sought to undermine any privileged position for Arabs within the nation of Islam. It emphasized equality between Muslims and was led predominantly by Persians. In the early 20th century, leading figures in the Pan-Arab movement began relying on the concept of Shu'ubiyya to mobilize the Arab population behind a common enemy. Kurd 'Alī and other pan-Arab activists in the region signalled out Shi'is within their vision of the Arab nation, including Shi'is of Arab origins, questioning their origins and loyalty.[19] The French mandate authorities were those who acknowledged the Shi'i Ja'fari *madhhab*, incorporating the Shi'i community into the new state of Lebanon. Among the emerging Shi'i intelligentsia, some expressed clear identification with Arabism, in its ethnic and political manifestations. They supported Arab-Syrian nationalists and rejected the French effort to separate Lebanon from Syria. Others began showing a growing affinity with the emerging Lebanese nation state in its effort to integrate the Shi'is.[20]

Ila al-Majma' al-'Ilmī al-'Arabī bi-Dimashq was an attempt to counter Kurd 'Alī's claims against the Shi'a, particularly given the strong connections between Arab nationalists in both countries. The treatise was published in 1949, six years after the French left Lebanon following agreement over the unwritten National Pact (al-Mīthāq al-Waṭanī). This was a power-sharing arrangement between Lebanese Christians and Muslims to create

[16]Ch. Pellat, 'Kurd ʿAlī', in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, shorturl.at/apKN7 (accessed 19/7/22); J.D.J. Waardenburg, M.A. Jazayery, J. M. Landau and Ed., 'Madjmaʿ ʿIlmī', in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, https://tinyurl.com/yh8vywr6 (accessed 19.7.22).

[17]Salim Tamari, 'Muhammad Kurd Ali and the Syrian-Palestinian Intelligentsia in the Ottoman Campaign against Arab Separatism' in Çiçek, M. Talha (ed.) *Syria in World War I: Politics, Economy, and Society* (London: Routledge, 2016), 37–60; Henry Siegman, 'Arab Unity and Disunity', *Middle East Journal* 16:1 (Winter, 1962), 48–59; Nuha N. N. Khoury, "The Dome of the Rock, the Ka'ba, and Ghumdan: Arab Myths and Umayyad Monuments", *Muqarnas* 10, Essays in Honour of Oleg Grabar (1993), 57–65.

[18]Muḥammad Kurd 'Alī, al-Islām wa'l ḥadāra al-'arabiyya I (Dār al-Kutūb al-Misṛiyya 1353/1934), 34–62.

[19]See, Enderwitz, S., 'al-Shuʿūbiyya', in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs. https://referenceworks-brillonline-com.eu1.proxy.openathens.net/entries/encyclopaedia-of-islam-2/al-shuubiyya-SIM_6997?s.num=0&s.f.s2_parent=s.f.book.encyclopaedia-of-islam-2&s.q=shu%27ubiyya (accessed 18.1.23); Scott Savran, "Cultural Polemics in the Early Islamic World: The Shu'ubiyya Controversy", *Journal for the Study of Peace and Conflict*, 42–52. See also, Michael Eppel, 'The Hikmat Sulayman-Bakir Sidqi Government in Iraq, 1936–37, and the Palestine Question' *Middle Eastern Studies* 24:1 (Jan. 1988), 25–41.

[20]Savran, *Cultural Polemics in the Early Islamic World: The Shu'ubiyya Controversy*,; Kais M. Firro (2006) "Ethnicizing the Shi'is in Mandatory Lebanon", *Middle Eastern Studies* 42:5, (Sep. 2006), 741–759. See also, "Tamara Chalabi, Community and Nation-State: The Shi'is of Jabal 'Amil and the New Lebanon, 1918–19", *PhD. Dissertation, Harvard University* (Jan. 2003).

a confessional distribution of high-level posts, in accordance with their numbers in the population.[21] Six years after the pact, Mūsawī approached Kurd ʻAlī from a position of strength, as Shiʻis were already represented in parliament and the speaker himself was a Shiʻi. Furthermore, there was also a change in the position of Sunnis in Lebanon, in their acceptance of the national pact. The Sunni leadership had to put aside their dream of Greater Syria and acknowledge the existence of Lebanon as a separate entity, thus enabling working relations with Christians and Shiʻis.

Mūsawī approached Kurd ʻAlī from an empowered position. He laid out Kurd ʻAlī's accusations against Shiʻism: the systematic spread of lies over historical narratives, the belief that the Imams represent divine perfection, the idea that what is prohibited is permitted by the Imams and the notion that Shiʻa Islam transformed a political party into a religious *madhhab*.[22] While refuting these accusations one by one, Mūsawī appealed for unity:

> And I ask the members of the Academy and all the Muslims that their Islamic unity should have an influence on their *maddhabi* particularities, and the people of one *madhhab* should not be intolerant of people from another *maddhab* so that all should be free in [following] the lawful guidance (*al-dalīl al-sharʻī*), just as it was for their forefather in the beginning of Islam (*kamā kāna ʻalayhi salafihim fī ṣadr al-islām*), and if they will act in this way they will be incomparably powerful . . . [23]

> And I do not understand why some members of the four *madhhab*s are angry at us? Isn't Allāh the Almighty the one and only who has no partner the God of all of us and Islam is our religion and the wise Qur'an our book and the Sayyid of the Prophets and the seal of the messengers Muḥammad b. ʻAbdullāh, Peace be Upon Him, our Prophet?; and his words, his actions and his decisions, his Sunna, and the Kaʻba our outcome; and *qibla*, and the five prayers, and the fasting month and the obligation of *zakāt* and the Hajj our duty . . . [24]

Mūsawī referred here to Shiʻa Islam as a *madhhab*, in par with the four acknowledged Sunni *madhāhib*. For Mūsawī, this was already a given status in Lebanon which cannot be questioned anymore by the broader Sunni world. Mūsawī created here a myth of an idyllic era of the forefathers (*salaf*), as an era of tolerance and obedience. His wording and ideas are reminiscent of the Salafi movement in its adulation towards the Golden Age of early Islam. Mūsawī emphasized conformity over the place of the Prophet and his Sunna; and did not mention disagreements over his traditions and the role of the transmitters. There is also no mention to the notion of Arabism, in regards to questions raised by Kurd ʻAlī over the ethnic origins of Shiʻa Islam. Musawi reflected here a traditional perspective of a Shiʻi *mujtahid*. While members of an emerging Shiʻi elite debated their national affiliation, for Musawi the core identity group remained Islam.

Yet this was a new cross-sectarian approach to religion in which Shiʻa Islam will be accepted as part of a broader orthodoxy. Stressing agreement over the fundamentals of religion, Mūsawī further argued that Sunnis and Shiʻis embrace the notion of *ijtihād* (the process of deriving legal precepts from the sources of law). Sunni Scholars both classical

[21] Farid El-Khazen, 'The Communal Pact of National Identities: The Making and Politics of the 1943 National Pact', Papers on Lebanon (Oxford University: Centre for Lebanese Studies, 1991), 12–68.
[22] ʻAbd al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mūsawī, *Ila al-Majmaʻ al-ʻIlmī al-ʻArabī bi-Dimashq* (Najaf: al-Naʻmān, 1387/1967), 16–39.
[23] Ibid. 10.
[24] Ibid.

and contemporary—from Abū Ḥanīfa and Shāfi'ī to Rashīd Riḍā and Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī—all agreed that God rewards those who endeavour for the sake of religion (*ijtahadū*). Mūsawī mentioned the following Hadith—agreed upon by all the above scholars—from the accepted collection of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī:

Narrate by 'Amr b. al-'Āṣṣ

> Then he heard Allāh's Apostle saying If a judge gives a verdict and applies *ijtihād* and the verdict was correct, he will receive a double reward; and if he ruled and applies *ijtihād* and his ruling is wrong, he will receive reward [vol. 9, book 92, number 450].[25]

Mūsawī provided a broader meaning to the traditional notion of *ijtihād*. While the Hadith speaks about the legal dimension of *ijtihād*, Mūsawī relied on this tradition to advance an all-embracing acceptance of Shi'ism, in its jurisprudence, theology and historiography. Mūsawī was not the first Shi''i reformist who called for a new recourse to *ijtihad*. Already in 1913, the Iraqi reformist Kāshif al-Ghiṭā'' spoke against *taqlīd* [imitation] in all fields of knowledge, in his Murāja''āt al-Rīḥāniyya [Re-examination of Rīḥāniyya or Rīḥānī's Treatises]. This two-volume book was a product of Kāshif al-Ghiṭā'''s dialogue with five leading figures in the Salafi and Nahda movements. These discussions centred on religious, philosophical, linguistic and cultural issues, focusing particularly on the meaning of knowledge, the significance of progress and the revival of the Arabic language.[26] In the opening to the 2nd volume, Kāshif al-Ghiṭā' declared:

> ... Closing the gates of *ijtihād* was a sin against knowledge ... This closure extended, until over the past centuries, *taqlīd* has spread to all fields of knowledge even among those who are considered scholars. They blindly followed the dictionary and *al-ṣuḥaḥ* in linguistics, the corpus of Ibn Hishām and grammar and Ibn Ḥājib in the area of *uṣūl*; and followed Abu Ḥānifa and Shāfi'ī in the area of *furū'* ...
>
> They have failed to understand that the one who has granted this great knowledge and gift did not entrust it and confine it to them alone ... since every *mujtahid* holds a portion of knowledge ... [27]

For Kāshif al-Ghiṭā', *ijtihād* was no longer a legal tool used only by the *mujtahid*; rather, it was applied to wide areas of knowledge 'since every *mujtahid* holds a portion of knowledge'. He spoke here about stagnation in all fields of knowledge, going beyond the traditional Shi'i understanding of *ijthihād*. Kāshif al-Ghiṭā' presented here a notion of *ijtihād* which was similar to the Salafi understanding, in its call for renewal of the texts through rational tools.

More than 30 years later, Mūsawī would rely on a Sunni Hadith on the reward of *ijthihād* to advance a similar tolerant and progressive worldview. Yet, this Hadith in its classical Sunni understanding did not incorporate Shi'i *ijtihād*, with its unique sources of law and its reliance on the Shi'i body of Hadith. Mūsawī called upon his Sunni brothers to legitimize Shi'ism as a trend that endeavours for the sake of God. Yet, Mūsawī disregarded the Sunni notion of

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[25]Ibid., 11.

[26]Elisheva Machlis, "A Shi'a Debate on Arabism: The Emergence of a Multiple Communal Membership Author", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 40:2 (APRIL 2013), 95–114.

[27]Muḥammad Ḥusayn Kāshif al-Ghiṭā', Al-Murāja'āt al-Rayḥāniyya [ḥiwār fikrī, adabī, 'aqā'idī bayna al- Kāshif al-Ghiṭā' wa-majmū'a min al-''ulamā'' wa'l udabā', 1913/1331 H], (Beirut: Dar al-Hādī, 2003), Vol. II, 5–6.

ijmā', in which Shi'a Islam was considered outside the accepted consensus of the *madhhab* system.[28] Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī provided Mūsawī with an explicit reference to Shi'a Islam:

> And this is what the scholar and researcher Shaykh Jamāl al-Dīn al-Qāsimī the Damascene contemporary said, in his treatise '*mīzān al-jarḥ wa'l-ta'dīl*' [The Balance between Criticism and Praise], after mentioning the Shi'a and the claims of Muslim in his *ṣaḥīḥ* against them; and these are his words: the *mujtahid*s of every faction (*firqa*) from among the Islamic factions are rewarded if they are right or wrong, according to the text of the Hadith of the Prophet.[29]

Responding to Kurd 'Alī, Mūsawī argued for *ijtihād*, as a shared cross-sectarian notion. Qāsimī, who was the mouthpiece of Damascene Salafis in the late 19th century, spoke about 'the brotherhood of believers' and called to put aside sectarian hatred. He also stressed conformity between diverse Muslim trends over the fundamental of religion, within a rational understanding of Islam. In his view, one of the main problems of the Muslim world was the intolerance of the *madhhab* system (*al-ta'assub li'l madhāhib*). The solution was *ijtihād* as a method to ovoid blind emulation to a particular *madhhab*.[30] As a contemporary of Kurd 'Alī, Qāsimī's revivalist agenda provided Mūsawī with an important basis to solidify his call for Muslim unity. The aim was to create a new affinity between Shi'ism and progressive Sunni forces, in their emphasis on reason and change, through *ijtihād*. By accepting an inter-sectarian recourse to *ijtihād*, Mūsawī was perhaps opening the door to redefining the special, exclusive role of Shi'i *mujtahid*s to exercise *ijtihād*, and the duty of the ordinary Shi'is to emulate the most learned *mujtahid*, the *marja' taqlīd*. This followed the creation of the Ja'fari Court in Lebanon which had already led to changes in the historical role of the *mujtahid*s.

Mūsawī's al-Naṣṣ wa'l Ijtihād (no date) [the text/designation and *ijtihad*] provides another perspective to this broad-ranging notion of *ijtihād*.[31] In this publication, Mūsawī reiterated a Shi'i-centred version of historiography, establishing Imam 'Alī's supreme authority, by relying on Sunni Hadith. Mūsawī mentioned here about a hundred cases in which the Companions opposed the explicit words of the Prophet regarding the designation of 'Alī. Explaining the aim of al-Naṣṣ wa'l Ijtihād, Mūsawī said:

> ... One who believes in these Qur'anic verses and believes in Muhammad's prophethood, must not deviate from his sayings even by a width of a hair and even by less. Those people were not presumed as deviators but as *mujtahid*s, interpreting his sayings by themselves ... *while they thought that they were acquiring good by their deeds* (Qur'an, 18:104). *Indeed, to Allāh we belong and to Him we will Return* *(Qur'an, 2:156).*
>
> ... Here they are in al-Naṣṣ wa'l Ijtihād the sources of their interpretation to the texts and their *ijtihād* which was applied for personal interests and reflected a situation of haste, weakness of the leaders, the chaos of adversity and grief and the passing of time ...
>
> And take these one hundred examples in seven chapters, examine them and then you have the right to give your opinion about them. Allāh is the Guide to the truth and to the right path

[28]On the notion of *ijmā'* see for example, Ali Abdullah bin Hamid, "Scholarly Consensus: *Ijma*': between Use and Misuse", *Journal of Islamic Law and Culture* 12:2 (July 2010), 92–113.
[29]Mūsawī, *Ila al-Majma'*, 11.
[30]David Dean Commins, *Islamic Reform: Politics and Social Change in Late Ottoman Syria* (Oxford University Press, 1990), 65–88.
[31]'Abd al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mūsawī, *al-Naṣṣ wa'l Ijtihād* (Beirut: Dār al-andalus. [–197], 7th edition.

> and to Him is our return. Allāh is Sufficient for us. Most Excellent is He, in Whom we trust. Most excellent is the Patron and most excellent is the Helper.[32]

Through his response to Kurd ʻAlī, Mūsawī advanced an all-embracing acceptance of Shiʻism, within a broad-ranging recourse to *ijtihād*. However, in his al-Naṣṣ wa'l Ijtihād, he himself did not accept Sunni *ijtihad*. Mūsawī reflected here a clear Shiʻi-centred perspective in which there is a limit to personal interpretation. One cannot apply *ijtihād* to the divinely ordained designation of Imam ʻAlī.

The debate over the question of Hadith

Al-Murājaʿāt [re-examination] displayed a similar bold response to Sunni Islam.[33] According to Mūsawī's account, the book was written following his visit to Egypt in 1329/1911 where he met Shaykh al-Azhar Salīm al-Bishrī (held the position from 1909 to 1916).[34] For about five months, the two began exchanging a series of letters, during the period in which Mūsawī remained in Egypt (1911–1912). The book was published in 1936 and was the product of this debate. It included 112 letters, beginning with a short statement or question by Salīm al-Bishrī and continuing with Mūsawī's lengthy reply. It includes a detailed correspondence between Mūsawī and Salīm al-Bishrī over the Shiʿi historical narrative and main principles and includes elaborate footnotes, based mainly on Sunni Hadith. When al-Murājaʿāt was written, the Jaʻfari Court was already active for 10 years with tribunals operating in Beirut, Sidon, Tyre, Nabatiyya, Marjaʿyun, Baʿlbak, Hirmil and other areas. Max Weiss argued that the Jaʻfari court contributed to the institutionalization of sectarianism in Lebanon. Yet, it also created fluid boundaries between Sunnis and Shiʻis. If a dispute was raised in both the Jaʿfari and the Sunni Shariʿa courts, the court immediately endeavoured to mitigate sectarian tension. For example, when a couple included a mixed Sunni-Shiʻi marriage, the court ruled that there was 'legally no difference' between establishing a marriage contract in a court that follows 'any sect of the Muslim Imams'.[35] Rainer Brunner questioned whether the debate took place, given the long gap between the correspondence and the publishing of the book. There is also a clear imbalance between the short passages attributed Salīm al-Bishrī and his polite tone; and the lengthy and detailed reply by Mūsawī. [36] However, even without verifying the actuality of this correspondence, the text of al-Murājaʿāt is important in presenting a new more flexible Shiʻi approach towards Sunni Hadith. This publication opened with the following words:

> The idea of the book ... to aspire towards a sound direction in which the Muslims will stop and sever the turmoil between them ... so they should view life from a new perspective, returning to the source of religion (*al-aṣl al-dīnī*) that is obligatory upon them. And then they will all advance and find refuge in the rope of God under the banner of truth (*ḥaqq*), knowledge (*ʿilm*) and action (*ʿamal*), within a brotherhood based on support for one another.

[32]Ibid., 72.
[33]The meaning of the term al-Murājaʿāt is re-examination, reiteration, and review, but also verification.
[34]ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mūsawī, *al-Murājaʿāt* (Dār al-Andalus, fifth edition, 1963), 17, 25–26.
[35]See Weiss, *Institutionalizing Sectarianism*.
[36]Brunner, *Islamic Ecumenism*, 51–81..

> ... And what we agree upon is that the sects – the Shiʿa and the Sunni – are Muslims who faithfully submit to the true religion of Islam; and they agree over what occurred with the Prophet and their disagreement over the basic origin, obstructs the connection with the true Islamic principle (*al-mabdaʾ al-islāmī al-sharīf*). There is no conflict between them beyond what occurs between *mujtahid*s over some rulings, and disagreements over what can be deduced from the Qur'an or the Sunna ... [37]

Mūsawī grounded this appeal for unity on notions of truth, knowledge and action, and on agreement over the sources of Islam and its core principles. Al-Murājaʿāt echoed the Salafi call to revive Islam by returning to the Qurʾan and the Sunna, and by re-examining the holy texts in accordance with contemporary circumstances.

In this dialogue over the question of Hadith, Mūsawī had to resolve diverse narratives anchored in the textual differences between the Sunni and Shi'i corpuses of traditions and in disagreements over the legitimacy of the transmitters. Over the centuries, prominent Sunni compilers of Hadith wrote chapters on the virtues of the Companions (*kitāb faḍā'il al-ṣaḥāba*) and on their *adāla* (just nature). Sunni veneration of the *ṣaḥāba* stemmed from their substantial position as the founding generation of Islam, and their role as transmitters of Hadith.[38] Those who rejected the *adāla* of the Companions and their authority were harshly condemned. The derogatory term of *rāfiḍa* [literally: the one who rejects, an apostate] as a nickname for Twelver Shi'a was associated with Shi'i defamation of the Companions. While Sunni scholars wrote biographies of Companions, Shi'is composed *rijāl* works devoted to the Imams.[39] Etan Kohlberg argued that Shi'i views towards the Companions were diverse and varied, over periods, schools, locations and official/popular Shi'ism. Prominent Shi'i scholars called to vilify the leading Companions and particularly the first two caliphs. This practice became an official policy under the Safavids (1501–1722). Yet, there was examples of a more nuanced position towards the *ṣaḥāba*.[40]

Ibn Qiba al-Rāzī (9–10th century) is among the earliest known Shi'i scholar who discussed the Companions legacy. Al-Rāzī argued that only a small group of Companions clearly violated 'Alī's designation, while most of the Companions acted in good faith. They were led to believe that there was a new *naṣṣ* that replaced 'Alī's designation, or concealed the *naṣṣ* tradition, due to threats by the rulers. Another example is in the classification of the Companions by Ibn Maʿṣūm (d. 1120/1708), who divided the Companions into rejected *(mardūd*) and accepted (*maqbūl*). This categorization reflected an understanding of human error, doubt and repentance, within a more multifaceted approach towards the legacy of the Companions.[41] Moreover, many Shi'i

[37]Al-Mūsawī, *al-Murājaʿāt*, 32–33.

[38]Fuad Jabali, 'The Companions of the Prophet: A Study of Geographical Distribution and Political Alignments' in Wadad Kadi and Rotraud Wielandt (eds.) *Islamic History and Civilization Studies and Texts* Vol. 47 (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 41–83; Scott C. Lucas, "Constructive Critics, Ḥadīth Literature, and the Articulation of Sunnī Islam: In: Wadad Kadi and Rotraud Wielandt (eds.), *Islamic History and Civilization: Studies and Texts* Vol. 51 (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2004), 221–237.

[39]E. Kohlberg, 'al-Rāfiḍa', in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs (eds.).
shorturl.at/eoQXZ (accessed 17.7.22). See also, Etan Kohlberg, *In Praise of the Few, Studies in Shi'i Thought and History*, 51–53.

[40]Kohlberg, *In Praise of the Few, Studies in Shi'i Thought and History*, 51–84; Etan Kohlberg, *The Attitude of the Imāmī-Shī'īs to the Companions of the Prophet*. PhD Thesis (University of Oxford, September 1971), 111–292; Rosemary Stanfield Johnson, 'Sunni Survival in Safavid Iran: Anti-Sunni Activities during the Reign of Tahmasp', *Iranian Studies* 271/4 Religion and Society in Islamic Iran during the Pre-Modern Era (1994, Vol. 27, No. 1/4, (1994), 123–133.

[41]Kohlberg, *In Praise of the Few, Studies in Shi'i Thought and History*, 51–84; Kohlberg, *The Attitude of the Imāmī-Shī'īs to the Companions of the* Prophet, 111–292.

scholars studied under Sunni teachers and within Sunni circles of learning, while inwardly maintaining a Shiʿi identity. Shiʿi participation in Sunni judicial circles was a product of their exclusionary minority position. Yet, it also reflected an extensive tradition of interaction between Sunni and Shiʿi jurisprudence.[42] Judicial collaboration also entailed some level of Shiʿi acceptance of Sunni sources of law, including the Hadith. Consequently, not only were Shiʿi views towards the Companions more diverse than presumed, but in practice, Shiʿi scholars also indirectly relied on Sunni Hadith. In essence, over centuries, Shiʿis demonstrated some level of acceptance of Sunni Hadith due to their status as a minority and their versatile approach towards the legacy of the Companions and due to the diverse nature of the Shiʿi community in its multiple locations. Mūsawī's contribution was in providing a more direct, extensive and critical approach to Sunni traditions in comparison with past perceptions, reflecting changes in the image of Shiʿis and in their relations with the broader Sunni-Arab arena, as will be demonstrated in the following discussion.

Already in his *al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimma* (1909), Mūsawī reassessed the contested Muslim historiography and particularly the role of the Rashidun, considered by Sunnis as among the great Companions of the Prophet:

> Knowledgeable people do not renounce the succession of the two Shaykhs – may God be pleased with them – and people of conscience do not doubt them. Their leadership went on from year 11 till year 23 [of the *hijra*] and during this period they began the conquests and religion took root. However, regarding political issues, their caliphates were terminated when they were put to the test. However, to what end should Muslims today clash for this reason and what will be the actual fruits that will result from belief in this?[43]

> Now then we should examine our current politics and abandon issues related to the politics of the past. The situation is critical and does not befit a process of uncovering hidden relics and vestiges of hatred. The time has come for the Muslims to pay attention to the divisions and dissention that befell them and left them bait for the beasts and prey for the insects. What is the aim of pronouncing Muslims infidels over a dispute on politics and over the caliphate of the past?...[44]

Mūsawī presented a new, more positive Shiʿi approach towards the first two Caliphs. They contributed to the growth of 'the community of believers' and to the expansion on the domain of the Muslim polity. Yet, his effort at appeasement did not eliminate his Shiʿi voice. Mūsawī referred to Abū Bakr 'al-Ṣiddīq' [the Upright, Truthful] and to 'Umar 'al-Fārūq' [the one who distinguishes between right and wrong], merely as shaykhs, without mentioning their names. He declared that their caliphate was terminated, insinuating that their short tenure was a punishment by God. Mūsawī adopted a utilitarian position, arguing that it is more beneficial in the current circumstances to put aside this historical clash. He also spoke about the politics of the past, moving closer to the Sunni narrative in which the clash of early Islam was not a religious issue, but a mere question of politics and human choices. Mūsawī did not totally acquit Abū Bakr and 'Umar from wrongdoing but

[42]Devin J. Stewart, *Islamic Legal Orthodoxy: Twelver Shiite Responses to the Sunni Legal System* (University of Utah Press 1998).
[43]Al-Mūsawī, *Al-Fuṣūl al-Muhimma*, 139.
[44]Ibid.

presented a more balanced approach towards their caliphate. He also advanced a similar depiction of the *ṣaḥāba*:

> And the truth is that companionship is a great virtue, but it is not a protection. And among the *ṣaḥāba* some were just and among them there were companions, loyal friends, and honest people and these were their scholars, their prominent ones; and there were also among them the ignorant and the hypocrites who only pretended to believe in Islam (*munāfiqūn*), from among the offenders and those who caused great calamities. . .[45]

Mūsawī reflected a complex approach towards the Companions: some were just, loyal and honest and some were ignorant and hypocrite. He also branded some of the Companions as *munāfiqūn*. This strong term was associated in Imami literature with those who did not follow the Prophet's commands to show loyalty to 'Alī. As mentioned, Shi'i scholars were not unanimous in their approach towards the *ṣaḥāba* and many among them did not condemn the Companions in their entirety. Mūsawī did not define the accepted and condemned Companions and did not name them, toning down the contested historiography and presenting a more human depiction of the *ṣaḥāba*, in comparison with historical Shi'i narratives on the legacy of the *ṣaḥāba*. In his al-Murājaʿāt, Mūsawī divided the acts of the Companions between two categories: requirements of religion versus political affairs. He emphasized that the Companions were totally committed to religious commandments and to the welfare of the Muslims. They faithfully followed the duties of religion, including fasting in Ramadan, practising the details of prayer and the fulfilling the requirement of the Hajj. However, in issues related to politics and state, they provided room for *ijtihād*. Mūsawī not only presented the *ṣaḥāba* as good Muslims, but even demonstrates some level of understanding to what he considered as their disregard for 'Alī. The Companions approach to the question of authority stemmed from fear of bloodshed. They were aware of the *naṣṣ* but were worried that 'Alī would not be accepted by the community and particularly the newly converts, who wanted to take revenge over 'Alī's battles against non-believers. [46] Consequently, the Companions ignored the question of *naṣṣ*, not out of disobedience to the Prophet's words, but from fear and political considerations.

Besides discussing the legacy of the Companions, the main purpose of al-Murājaʿāt was to convince his correspondent of the veracity of Shi'a Islam. He established the foundational basis of Shi'a Islam, focusing on the notions *ahl al-bayt* and *al-ʿitra al-ṭāhira*. The term *ahl al-bayt* refers to the family of the Prophet. Shiʿi Islam limits this notion to five members of the Prophet's household known also as *ahl al-kisāʾ* [the People of the Cloak]. Sunni Islam contested this view of a divinely selected family (*naṣṣ*). They widened the scope of the 'Prophet's family' to include the descendants of 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib (the Prophet's grandfather) and even the whole clan of Hāshim.[47]

[45]Mūsawī, *Abū Hurayra*, 7.
[46]Al-Mūsawī, *al-Murājaʿāt*, 279–283.
[47]Moshe Sharon, '*Ahl al-Bayt*—People of the House', *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 8 (1986), 169–184; M. Sharon., 'People of the House', in: *Encyclopaedia of the Qurʾān*, General Editor: Jane Dammen McAuliffe, Georgetown University, Washington DC, https://tinyurl.com/z7sumusj (accessed July 3, 2022). See also, Farhad Daftary, 'Ahl al-Kisāʾ', in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, Edited by: Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, Everett Rowson. https://tinyurl.com/345wktba (accessed July 3, 2022).

Shi'i belief in the pure family, *al-itra al-ṭāhira* is based on the Qur'an: ... *Innamā yurīdu Allāhu liyudhhiba 'ankum al-rijsa ahlā al-baytī wa-yuṭahhirakum taṭhīran*. 'God wishes to keep uncleanness away from you, people of the [Prophet's] House, and to purify you thoroughly' (Q XXXIII:33).[48] This notion is also based on Hadith al-Thaqalayn (the 'Two Weighty Matters') in which the Prophet says to his followers that he has left behind for them two weighty things: the Qurʾān and his family, the *ahl al-bayt*. The Hadith appears in various versions also in Sunni Hadith.[49] In al-Murājaʿa No. 8, Mūsawī quoted several Sunni scholars of Hadith to demonstrate that Sunnis themselves endorsed the concepts of *ahl al-bayt* and *al-'itra*.[50] He focused on the following Sunni scholars: al-Tirmidhī (a prominent Hadith collector of the 9th century),[51] al-Muttaqī al-Hindī (A Sunni scholar of Sufism and Hadith [1472–1567]),[52] al-Ṭabarānī (among the most important scholars of Hadith of the 9th century (260–360/873–971),[53] and Ḥākim Nishapurī (a Persian Sunni scholar, known as the 'Muhaddith of Khorasan' [321/933–405/1014]).[54] Nevertheless, as emphasized above, Sunnis and Shi'is provided a very different understanding to the meaning of *ahl al-bayt* and *al-'itra*. Mūsawī ignored here the more expansive understanding of these notions as they appear in Sunni thought since it did not serve his agenda of proving the veracity of Shi'a Islam.

Another example is al-Murājaʿa No. 10 in which Mūsawī established the legitimacy of 'Alī's *wilāya*.[55] Mūsawī quoted the following Hadith which appears in several variations in Sunni sources: '*sami'tu rasūl Allāh ... yaqūlu min aḥibu an yiḥyā ḥayātī wa-yammūtu mītatī wa yadkhulu al-janna allatī wa'dnī rabbī wa-hiyya Jannat al-khalad; fa-liyatawalla 'Alī wa-dhariyyatihi min ba'dihi* ... ' [I heard the Messenger ... saying whoever would like to live my life and to die my death and enter the garden/paradise that my Lord has promised me, the garden of the soul, so he should accept 'Alī and his offspring as his friend ...].[56] The verb *tawalla* holds the double meaning of nomination or power; but also bringing one closer and accepting one as a friend. The related notion of *wilāya* holds the meaning of friendship; and the term *walī* is also applied to God who is the believers' friend.[57] It can also refer to exceptional blessed people or saints who are close to God. *Wilāya* also derives from *wālī* which denotes the exercise of authority, temporal or spiritual.[58] Sunni scholars

[48]*The Qurʾan*. A New Translation by M. A. S. Abdel Haleem (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004, 2005), 268.

[49]Fareeha Khan, 'Ahl al-Bayt' in: *Oxford Encyclopaedia of the Islamic World: Digital Collection*. Editor: John L. Esposito (Exford University Press, 2022), (accessed July 3, 2022).

[50]Al-Mūsawī, *al-Murājaʿāt*, 49–54.

[51]Juynboll, G.H.A., 'al-Tirmidhī', in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, https://tinyurl.com/2f73hxy3 (accessed July 3, 2022).

[52]Hosain, M. Hidayet, 'al-Muttaḳī al-Hindī', in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, First Edition (1913–1936)*, Edited by M. Th. Houtsma, T.W. Arnold, R. Basset, R. Hartmann, https://tinyurl.com/mt4w6mf4 (accessed July 3, 2022).

[53]Fierro, Maribel, 'al-Ṭabarānī', in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, https://tinyurl.com/3td6zw56 (accessed July 3, 2022).

[54]Sohail Akhtar, 'A Critical Study of the Historiography of Imam Abu Abdullah Muhammad Al-Hakim Neshapuri', *Perennial Journal of History* (PJH) II:II (July-December 2021), 104–113.

[55]Al-Mūsawī, *al-Murājaʿāt*, 55–60.

[56]Al-Mūsawī, *al-Murājaʿāt*, 46–49.

[57]The term *walī* in the lower case is used to denote 'the friend of God' whereas *al-Walī* with the definitive article is one of the names of God, and thus can be applied to God as the friend of the believer.

[58]Mawil Y. Dien, and P.E. Walker, 'Wilāya', in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C. E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, https://tinyurl.com/4wfspefr (accessed 12.7.22); B. Radtke, P. Lory, Th. Zarcone, D. DeWeese, M. Gaborieau, F.M. Denny, Aubin Françoise, J.O. Hunwick and N. Mchugh, 'Walī', in: *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, Edited by: P. Bearman, Th. Bianquis, C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs, https://tinyurl.com/433bzfkr (accessed 12.7.22).

emphasized that ʻAlī is viewed as a friend and that the Prophet required friendship and respect for ʻAlī. Shiʻis, on the other hand, view ʻAlī and his descendants as the only legitimate successors to the Prophet in both his political and spiritual roles.[59] Mūsawī did not discuss the dual meaning of *tawalla* and relied on this notion and its derivatives to establish ʻAlī's special position.

In al-Murājaʿa No. 24 Mūsawī declared that Sunnis themselves presented proof to the notion of *imāma*.[60] This topic is discussed in many authenticated books of Hadiths, including both *mutawātir* and *ghayr mutawātir* (*ḥadīth mutawātir* is a tradition reported by a significant number of narrators). Therefore, Mūsawī declared: 'we will seek proof through this [these sources] due to the soundness of their path'.[61] Elaborating on the concept of *imāma*, Mūsawī said:

> And my argument is … that anyone who says that ʻAlī was *khalīfat rasūl Allāh fī ahl baytīhi* speaks about *al-khilāfa al-ʻamma* (his general caliphate) and anyone who rejects his *khilāfa al-ʻamma* also rejected his *khilāfa al-khāṣṣa* (his specific caliphate) …

Mūsawī established ʻAlī's authority by resorting to the Sunni notion of caliphate. The terms Caliphate and Imamate are two central concepts that define leadership in Sunni and Shiʻi thought, the former associated with Sunni Islam and the latter with Shiʻism. Nevertheless, there are cases in which Shiʻis have used the term Caliphate and Sunnis the concept of Imamate. Some Sunni scholars used the term Caliphate and Imamate intermittently to denote leadership. True Imamate denoted the period of the four rightly guided caliphs, and kingship described the more problematic Muslim leaderships which followed this Golden Age of Islam. Yet, in contrast with the Shiʻi perception, rulership (*khilāfa*/*imāma*) was not a divine obligation.[62] Mūsawī argued that *al-khilāfa al-ʻamma* incorporates also *al-khilāfa al-khāṣṣa*. He resorted to the Sunni notion of *khilāfa* in an attempt to legitimize the Shiʻi belief in *al-imāma al-khāṣṣa*. Yet, Mūsawī ignored the complex Sunni position over ʻAlī's figure. He relied on Sunni Hadith in a superficial way and did not delve into the contested legacy of ʻAlī in Sunni sources. Sunni difficulty was over how to balance between ʻAlī's status as a prominent member of the Prophet's family, a Companion of the Prophet and the fourth caliph; while rejecting Shiʻi veneration of 'the chosen family'. Indeed, there are many Sunni Hadith scholars who expanded on the merits of ʻAlī and his family.[63] Nevertheless, they tended to reject the belief in ʻAlī's superiority to all others after the Prophet (known as *tafḍīl ʻAlī*). Some expressed a stronger objection to ʻAlī's legacy and venerated other Companions. Ibn Taymiyya exemplified this tendency. Among prominent Sunni compilers of Hadith, there are more Hadiths in praise of Abū Bakr than of ʻAlī. There is also an effort to exonerate leading Companions who were

[59]Mohammad Ali Amir-Moezzi, 'Ghadīr Khumm' in *EI III* Online edition (accessed 6.7.22).
[60]Al-Mūsawī, *al-Murājaʿāt*, 101.
[61]Al-Mūsawī, *al-Murājaʿāt*, 135.
[62]Hayrettin Yücesoy, 'Justification of Political Authority in Medieval Sunni Thought', in Asma Afsaruddin (ed.), *Islam, the State and Political Authority: Medieval Issues and Modern Concerns* (Palgrave: Macmillan, 2011), 9–33; Halil Ibrahim Yenigun, "Religious Traditions in Politics: Islam, Sunni and Shiʻa', *Encyclopaedia of Politics* (Oxford University Press), online edition (accessed 6.7.22).
[63]See for example, Aḥmad ibn Jalāl al-Dīn Ijī, Faḍāʾil al-thaqalayn min kitāb tawḍī al-dalāʾil ʿalā tarjīkh al-faḍāʾil, Ḥusayn al-Ḥasanī al-Bīrjandī (ed.) (Tehran: al-Majmaʿal-ʿĀlamī li'l-Taqrīb bayna al-Madhāhib al-Islāmiyya, 2007); Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Kanjī, Kifāyat al-ṭālib fī manāqib ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib wa yalāhi al-Bayān fī akhbār Ṣāḥib al-Zamān (Tehran: Dār Iḥyāʾ Turāth Ahl al-Bayt, 1984); Nasāʾī, Khaṣāʾis ʿAmīr al-Muʾminīn ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib, Muḥammad Hādī al-Amīnī (ed.) (Tehran: Maktaba al-Nīnawā al-ḥadītha, 1969).

involved in the revolt against ʻAlī. Yet, there are corpuses of Hadith in which ʻAlī's merits dominate over others.[64]

Mūsawī also dealt with the Hadith al-Manzila, as one of the most important sources which establish Shi'i claim to sole leadership.[65] Hadith al-Manzila confirms the special relationship between the Prophet and Imam ʻAlī and is viewed by Shi'i scholars as proof to Imam ʻAlī's right to leadership. The Hadith has been narrated by the Prophet on several occasions and appears in various versions.[66] Establishing ʻAlī's unique position, the Prophet declared: 'you are to me like Aaron to Moses, except that there is no Prophet after me'.[67] The Jewish tradition on the relationship between Aaron and Moses provides some level of affirmation to the Shi'i understanding of Hadith al-Manzila. Aaron is chosen as Moses's helper and is later assigned to the significant position of high priest. God also speaks directly to Aaron who similar to Moses also performs miracles. Furthermore, Aaron and his descendants are given a special holy status to perform the rituals in the temple.[68]

Mūsawī discussed Hadith al-Manzila in several letters that appear in al-Murājaʿāt. He argued that Sunnis have confirmed the validity of this important tradition within their most authentic collections. Moreover, the Hadith should be understood in its general assertion of ʻAlī's leadership, and not in a specific context.[69] Yet, Sunni commentators of Hadith argued for a particular context of Hadith al-Manzila, related to the Expedition to Tabuk. In the year 9/630 [or according to other accounts 10/631], the Prophet prepared for a raid from Medina on Tabuk against the Byzantines and Arab tribes. ʻAlī remained in Medina and under the orders of the Prophet did not participate in the battle. According to the Sunni tradition, the Prophet's words to ʻAlī, as reflected in Hadith al-Manzila, came as a reply to ʻAlī's desire to join the expedition. Furthermore, Sunni commentators emphasize that the comparison to Aaron and Moses should be understood as reflecting relations of knowledge, closeness and lineage but not Prophethood or succession. Since Aaron died before Moses, the tradition should be understood as confined to the Prophet's lifetime. Moreover, it should be limited to the Prophet's last years and not afterwards, in the context of the Battle of Tabuk. The comparison to Aaron and Moses further emphasizes the context of Tabuk since this was reference to the example of Moses who had left his brother Aaron in charge of the community when he ascended mount Sinai.[70]

Through this correspondence with Shaykh al-Azhar, Mūsawī sought to gain acknowledgement of Shi'a Islam within this important Sunni centre of al-Azhar. He demonstrated some level of affinity with the early Salafis in his recourse to the sources of religion and to the notion of caliphate, and in his emphasis on knowledge and action. The text itself remains within the confinements of a traditional Shi'i narrative and does not provide a new in-depth response to Sunni counter claims. Nevertheless, its significance is in creating a sense of equilibrium between both leaders and the two trends of Islam, thus mitigating the historical place of a persecuted minority.

[64]Nebil Husayn, *Opposing the Imām: The Legacy of the Nawāṣib in Islamic Literature* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 15–38, 161–197. See also, Lucas, *Constructive Critics*, 221–285.

[65]The term *manzila* can be translated as position, standing or status.

[66]G. Miskinzoda, 'The Significance of the Hadīth of the Position of Aaron for the Formulation of the Shīʿī doctrine of Authority', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 78:1 (2015), 67–82.

[67]See, shorturl.at/aef16.

[68]Miskinzoda, *The Significance of the Hadīth of the Position of Aaron*.

[69]Al-Mūsawī, *al-Murājaʿāt*, 155–166.

[70]See for example the following commentators: https://tinyurl.com/5ckn8sur. See also, https://tinyurl.com/2cfrrsce; Miskinzoda, *The Significance of the Hadīth of the Position of Aaron*.

Nine years later, Mūsawī wrote another treatise which dealt with Sunni Hadith, focusing on Abū Hurayra, the prolific narrator in Sunni sources. Al-Murājaʿāt presented Sunni Hadith in a positive light and even in conformity with Shi'a historiography. In contrast, Mūsawī's Abū Hurayra presented a strong attack on this important narrator. 'Abd Allah (or 'Abd al-Raḥman) Abū Hurayra (d. 59/678) was the most prolific transmitter of Sunni Hadith, with over 5000 traditions narrated by him. Sunni tradition described Abū Hurayra as among the closest companions to the Prophet. He accepted Islam in the seventh year of the Hijra and remained with the Prophet until his death, assisting him and memorizing his words.[71] The significance of Mūsawī's Abū Hurayra was in its approach to both the content and the transmitter, providing a much more extensive critique of Sunni Hadith in comparison to traditional modes of Hadith criticism.

Over the centuries, due to the immense numbers of traditions, Hadith scholars began developing methods to distinguish between genuine and problematic traditions. There was less of a tendency to criticize the content of the traditions (*matn*) and more of a focus on criticism of the *isnād* (the chain of transmitters). Jonathan A.C. Brown argued that content criticism of Hadith did exist in the formative period of the 3rd/9th and 4th/10th centuries, particularly among Muʿtazilite circles. However, in many cases *matn* criticism was hidden behind *isnad* criticism due to strong objections to the rational tools of '*ilm al-kalām*' [theology; an autonomous religious science which brings to the service of religious beliefs discursive arguments]. Leading Muslim scholars including Abū Ḥanīfa (80/699–150/767), raised doubts over the reliability of Abū Hurayra, due to his large number of traditions and their questionable character.[72] Hadith criticism received a renewed impetus by Salafi and modernist forces, within a new emphasis on reason, rationalism and *ijtihād*. Modern Hadith criticism focused predominantly on the authenticity of the *matn*, with growing reliance on Western critical methods. Beginning with Muḥammad Abduh (1849–1905) and Rashīd Riḍā (1865–1935), Hadith criticism became a heated topic, linked to the work of Western Orientalists who cast doubt over a large body of traditions. For example, Goldziher (d. 1921) and Guillaume (d. 1966) argued that Abū Hurayra exemplified the problematic nature of the traditions. Mūsawī's Abū Hurayra was a Shi'i critique on a prominent narrator, demonstrating his affinity with broader modernist voices in the region.

Mūsawī was the first modern Muslim scholar who directly attacked Abū Hurayra. This publication (1945) demonstrated the growing confidence of Mūsawī, 2 years after the agreement over the national pact, that provided Shi'is with an official role in the state apparatus. Furthermore, Mūsawī felt comfortable to attack Abū Hurayra given the renewed interest in Hadith criticism within Sunni circles. Nevertheless, this was a bold move given the fact that up until this period, only Western Orientalists directly attacked

[71]See for example 'Abū Hurayra' in J.A.A Juynboll, *Encyclopaedia of Canonical Ḥadīth* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2007), 45–47; Usman Ghani, '"Abū Hurayra" a Narrator of Ḥadīth Revisited: An Examination into the Dichotomous Representation of an Important Figure in Ḥadīth with Special Reference to Classical Islamic Modes of Criticism', *PhD. Thesis, University of Exeter* (July 2011), 1–83.

[72]Mutaz al-Khatib, 'Hadith criticism between Traditionists and Jurisprudents', in Belel Abu-Alabbas, Michael Dann and Christopher Melchert (eds.) *Modern Hadith Studies: Continuing Debates and New Approaches* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 129-150; Juynboll. *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature*, 4–14; Albrecht Noth, 'Common Features of Muslim and Western Ḥadīth Criticism: Ibn al-Jawzī's Categories of Ḥadīth Forgers' in Herald Motzki *(ed.) Ḥadīth: Origins and Developments* in Lawrence I. Conrad (General ed.) *The formation of the Classical Islamic World* Vol. 28 (London & New York: Routledge, 2004), 310–315; Jonathan A.C. Brown, 'How We Know Early Ḥadīth Critics Did *Matn* Criticism and Why It's So Hard to Find', *Islamic Law and Society* 15 (2008), 143–184.

Abū Hurayra. In 1958, 13 years after the publication of Mūsawī's treatise, the Egyptian scholar Maḥmud Abū Rayya presented a strong assault on the reliability of the Hadith, dedicating a chapter to Abū Hurayra. This led to a barrage of counter-attacks by traditional circles who sought to defend the legacy of Abū Hurayra.[73]

In the opening to his Abū Hurayra, Mūsawī discussed the essence of his book:

> This is a study of the life of a Companion who narrated the Prophet—Peace be upon Him—so much until he exceeded the proper limits, and he was narrated by those who are sound among the public (*ṣaḥāḥ al-jumhūr*) [reference to the two most trusted collections of Hadith, Sahih al-Bukhari, and Sahih al-Muslim] and by the rest of the Hadith collections also excessively. We must study the roots of this abundance due to its direct connection to our life religiously and rationally ... [74]

> ... And in essence, the Sunna is the path of Islam and the constitution of life and the gate necessary for the formation of life, including morals, belief, social interaction, knowledge, and ethics. And it cannot be logically right that we remain silent towards this perversion that is disgraceful towards the essence of Islam and its sublime spirit that calls to free and liberate oneself from the shackles of foolish beliefs and fables that are opposed to rationality ... [75]

Mūsawī approached the topic of Abū Hurayra from an all-Muslim perspective. 'We must study the abundance of these traditions', Mūsawī declared. Denouncing Abū Hurayra's narrations is not a question of Sunni versus Shi'i traditions. Mūsawī pronounced the Sunna itself as the path of Islam for all Muslims, without differentiating between Sunni and Shi'i Hadith. He sought to gain Muslim support for this effort to purify the Hadith, in the name of religion but also in the name of rationalism: the struggle against foolish and ignorant beliefs should unite the entire Muslim community.

Questioning Abū Hurayra's trustworthiness, Mūsawī said:

> From these observations we have now in our hands the following categories: some of these traditions contradict the horizons and power of rationality, some impair upon Islamic belief in its form and meaning, some infringe upon the rules of nature and some of them are incompatible and invalid. In addition, some of these traditions deviate from the foundation of knowledge, which is the backbone of religion. Furthermore, many of them flatter the Umayyads or the public opinion of those days, and some of them are imaginary or confused. In general, they deviate from the basis of truth in all meanings.[76]

Mūsawī's strong criticism against Abū Hurayra stemmed from his sheer volume of tradition and the fact that they spanned over a long period of time. Furthermore, Abū Hurayra came from a poor background. He lived among the *sukkan al-ṣuffa* (the dwellings of the poor people who found refuge in the Prophet's Mosque) and therefore had an ulterior motive in following the Prophet.[77] Mūsawī provided examples of 40 Hadiths narrated by Abū Hurayra which Mūsawī described as irrational, unfounded, and inconsistent. This included traditions describing a cow and wolf that spoke Arabic, newborn babies who spoke or the tradition the Da'ud read

[73] Ghani, *'Abū Hurayra' a Narrator of Ḥadīth Revisited*, 288–311; 34–46; Juynboll. *The Authenticity of the Tradition Literature*, 34–46.
[74] ʿAbd al-Ḥusayn Sharaf al-Dīn al-Mūsawī, *Abū Hurayra* (Najaf: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Ḥaydariyya, 1385/1965, 3d. edition), 5.
[75] Ibid., 6.
[76] Ibid., 9.
[77] Ibid., 21–26, 45–48.

the entire Qur'an in one second.[78] Mūsawī perhaps thought that Sunni modernists will be able to accept this assault by a Shi'i scholar on a proliferate transmitter due to rising significance of Hadith criticism. Furthermore, authenticating the body of traditions from untrustful narrators may also lead to purifying the Hadith from anti-Shi'i traditions.

Conclusion

Mūsawī was among the first Shi'i scholars of the early 20th century who extensively incorporated Sunni Hadith into his writings. The novelty in Mūsawī thought was in his substantial references to Sunni Hadith as a main source, in multiple treatises. This was not a minor allusion to Sunni Hadith, as a reflection of the subtle interaction between Sunni and Shi'i jurisprudence, over centuries. Instead, Mūsawī embraced a critical approach towards the Sunni narrative, but also towards the Shi'i view of the *ṣaḥāba*, relying on a long list of Sunni compilers. Mūsawī presented a human depiction of the Companions and particularly the first Caliphs. He portrayed the *ṣaḥāba* as good Muslims, and even demonstrates some level of understanding to their disregard for the Prophet's ordinance. His reliance on Sunni Hadith was not for purposes of *taqiyya*. These treatises also cannot be viewed as traditional polemical works. Instead, they reflected Mūsawī's position as a proud Shi'i, leader of the Lebanese community in Tyre during the first half of the 20th century, as his community began integrating into the new nation state and received representation in its new institutions. Beyond Lebanon, Mūsawī perceived himself as a peer of Sunni modernized forces in the region and thought the time was ripe for acceptance of Shi'ism, through a more critical approach to Hadith. The aim was to place Shi'ism on par with Sunni Islam, within a legitimate debate between respected Muslim scholars. Mūsawī did not deviate from classical Shi'i notions. Nevertheless, he joined forces with other Shi'i reformists in Lebanon and Iraq in their new quest for historical reconciliation with Sunnis, within a more expanded notion of orthodoxy, which endorses the *ja'afari madhhab*. His treatises reiterated the main classical Shi'i arguments over the question of authority in Islam; but were presented within a framework of Muslim unity, Shi'i empowerment and modern notions of reason, rationalism and progress. In his understanding, Sunni recognition of a toned down Shi'i historiography together with Shi'i endorsement of Sunni Hadith, may pave the way for a cross-sectarian narrative, based on a the shared principles of Islam and on a rational approach to the texts.

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[78]Ibid., 9–16, 54–174.